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The Radical Faculty -- What Are Its Goals?

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According to radical faculty members and students, universities have been contradicting their humanistic educational ideals by concentrating on competitive professionalism and non-academic research in a struggle for institutional power in a preponderantly capitalistic society. It is their belief that meaningful education provides intellectual development, enhances personal fulfillment, and emphasizes contributions to society by both students and faculty. The university is perceived as a liberal and vital component of a new human-oriented, democratic culture. The radical faculty suggest that admissions policies be designed to find the college best suited to the talents of each student, and that professionalism, with its attendant personal and/or class competition, be eliminated. Students should be provided with academic environments within which they may develop innate talents and pursue knowledge at a pace determined by their abilities. Faculty, students and community should participate in the process of educational administration, and programs should encourage democratic relationships between universities and other institutions. Individual and institutional expertise, as a collective force in a new social structure, would therefore benefit society as a whole. (WM)

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Group V THE RADICAL FACULTY--WHAT ARE ITS GOALS?

by

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What the radical faculty wants is not up to me to say. Indeed, I am far from certain whether it can be spoken of as a corporate body, or whether its goals are to be readily separated from those of some liberals or even a few conservatives. Nor am I certain, considering the oppressive needs of our society, that any set of academic goals is worth anyone's bother. Given the continued American aggression in Vietnam, the strangulation of the third world by economic colonialism, the murderous suppression of America's black liberation movement, the systematic harrassment of peace workers and the jailing of draft resisters--given these harsh realities, the concerns of academic radicals seem not only trivial, but boring. We live in an age when the push of a button could lead to the obliteration of large parts of the globe and the incineration of most of its inhabitants. Compared to this, academic bitching--of any political hue--seems like pretty small beer. The problem, alas, with dismissing the demands of faculty radicals, is that I happen to work at a university. Furthermore, colleges and universities serve an enormously important institutional role in our society: four out of every ten people in the age group now attend some institution of higher learning, and most of these young men and women are not suffering through the boredom of classes and laboratories for the sake of spiritual improvement or enlightenment. They are in school to be prepared for their roles in the industrial state. Perhaps a few of them are drawn to higher education by the presence of some of our best button-pushers--atomic or otherwise--on the faculties of our most distinguished universities.

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My uneasiness goes further. Should faculty members, rather than students, be left to formulate the goals of radicals in the academy? I doubt it. It is difficult--perhaps nearly impossible--for someone with a vested interest to see the university for what it it. And any professor has a vested interest. Is it surprising that the radical faculty is largely the creation of the student movement? Hardly. It was the sit-ins and the student rebellions

which shook many faculty members out of their ideological torpor, and reminded them of their responsibilities as critics and moral beings. SDS and the young men resisting the draft made it possible, once more, to conceive of academics playing a radical political role. So a warning: it is radical students, rather than faculty, with whose demands you will have to deal. They may be much less ideologically shackled than the likes of me.

What I am saying will make sense to you only if we begin with certain commonly held assumptions. Since I imagine that we have our differences, it might be useful to state some of the premises of my argument, though you are not likely to accept them. I assume that American society is a disaster. How odd. After all, in terms of abstract models, our economy is a success: the rate of growth is steady; most of the major financial problems have apparently been taken care of; and there is no large-scale unemployment. Capitalism has been a success and no major revolution is likely to occur in the foreseeable future. Yet American society is a disaster. It is a disaster precisely because its abstract economic success has given America an inordinate amount of power. This power is dangerous both to the citizens of America and to the millions in other countries whose well-being depends on our rulers' determination of the national interest. In much of its research, in the training it provides, and in the ideologies it helps to formulate, higher education is an instrument of this power. The stated educational objectives of the academy--the mask of liberal education--serve as a ritual, as one more nostalgic memory. The academy's primary function is institutional, not educational; we all have our degrees, but our real task is the administration of power. Higher education is not only a fraud, it is a national danger. Certainly it is the single institution most dangerous to our intellectual culture.

Our perceptions of current difficulties differ, no doubt. Therefore what I say is not likely to overwhelm you with the inevitability of its logic. But this hardly matters. Were I to convince you that the goals of the radical faculty are desirable or good or even correct, there is little you could do to implement your new convictions. For it seems to me unlikely that many of you have the institutional power to effect radical change on your campus. And the differences between us are largely a matter of the institutional roles we play, rather than of our personal convictions. So no amount of discussion--or even agreement--amongst us will make the tensions between radicals and the academy disappear. The myth of a liberal consensus helped to depoliticize most American intellectuals and students after World War II. But it has become increasingly difficult to hide our country's real divisions and struggles behind the screen of an impotent dialogue. Vietnam, the black revolution, student strikes, and the general disaffection of the young have seen to that. No, our problems are not to be located in a failure of communication--a failure to be rectified on occasions like this one.

So let us be clear on this: the radical faculty does not simply want to be communicated with, or heard, or to be given representation on committees where it will be dutifully listened to and then ignored. What it wants, instead, is a meaningful form of power. Do not get nervous. The uses of power to radicals are only accidentally related to those of members of university corporations. To us, the possession of power does not imply manipulation, the wielding of force, or the attempt to control the lives of our students.

But let me return to the beginning: what are the radical faculty's goals? Stated abstractly, they are not very different from those of any honest academic humanist. The humanist ideal is best summed up in Matthew Arnold's formulation: "Getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits." Arnold assumed that knowledge, both scientific and humanistic, should lead to the criticism of life; that its proper end is to make us better human beings, to make us more humane. In a university which pretends to be doing "value-free" research, these are radical goals, indeed.

Some corollaries can be drawn from Arnold's propositions: that proposals for research be honest; that grants be awarded only to projects intended for the betterment of humanity and the improvement of general knowledge; that there be a boycott of industrial and war research; that no research be initiated for the sake of professional advancement; and that professors not use the university as a base for making fortunes or world reputations.

Some more distant implications are implicit in the humanistic ideal. The college president who contemptuously refers to his faculty as a debating society is not a humanist. Surely an elementary component of any humanistic education is that the administration of learning be open and honest. There should be no closed meetings of the faculty or corporation. Indeed, the division between student, faculty, staff and administration has no place in any institution which claims to be primarily concerned with learning. To exclude students--and faculty, for that matter--from the decisions made by the corporation is to treat them with condescension. Worse, it is to be grossly provocative. We must all become full participants in the entire university enterprise. So many academics tend to treat their piece of turf as sacred and untouchable ground, and therefore react in terror to student demands for power. Students--does one really need to say it?--are not an invading horde; they are not children to be threatened with punishment when they get out of line; they ought, in fact, to be the center of any university community. But the latter clearly threatens entirely too many vested interests.

Another lesson to be drawn from Arnold's admonition that scholarship be turned to humane ends is that we learn to understand--indeed, sympathize with--the moral outrage which, given our students' institutional impotence, inevitably expresses

itself in militant activism. A profound seriousness--a dedication to traditional ethics--is the force which generates the current student rebellions. Students at Berkeley, Columbia and elsewhere have had the gall to use the academy's humanist rhetoric as a guide to action. Clearly this is embarrassing. Even more embarrassing is for students and faculty to offer the university as a sanctuary for those who refuse to participate in the destruction of Vietnam. For such an action pursues us into our scholarly hideouts and confronts us with the necessity for making moral choices. The least any college administration could do is to neutrally respect this grappling with the matters of life and death. For a college president, instead, to call the police without consulting students or faculty, for him to act duplicitously, to not even attempt a dialogue with those in the sanctuary--this is to show contempt for the very humanistic ideals he allegedly administers.

Perhaps the imperatives of the humanistic ideal for higher education can best be put negatively. The university, any humanist should know, ought not to be a service station or cafeteria; its chief activity ought not to be research; it should certainly not be an instrument in the "national interest;" conversely, it must not be allowed the comfortable pretense of being an ivory tower.

No doubt many of you feel that the morals I have drawn from Arnold's formula, though possibly reasonable, or even edifying, represent little more than a childish reversion to utopian wish-fulfillment; that they are products of a mind not accustomed to the sobering realities of power. No doubt you are right. Humane scholarship, decency, honesty, democratic procedure, compassion -- all these are wildly utopian, given the nature of our universities, and of the society they so accurately reflect.

So let us forget about the university as a humanistic abstraction. For is it not obvious that the goals of the radical faculty cannot be stated solely in terms of the university? That its goals must necessarily involve society as a whole? The matter is no different for student radicals. If they really want institutional power, that power will have to be wrested from those who hold it. I cannot envision anything of the sort occurring without a shift in the society's allocation of power. Most important of all, in the struggle for power in the university power must not become its own end. It is worth attaining only if it is to be used for meaningful educational -- that is social and personal -- ends. If institutional power is to serve students in determining and fulfilling their lives, they will need as guide not only a new model of the university, but a new model of man and society.

What then are the radical faculty's goals for society? They are no different from those of any radical or socialist or anarchist. I think they have been stated clearly by Andre Gorz, in his important book, Strategy for Labor:

> Economically, it (Socialism) can mean nothing but collective ownership of the means of production, that is to say the end of exploitation. But socialism is also more than that: it is also a new type of relationship among men, a new order of priorities, a new model of life and culture. If it is not all this also, it loses its meaning. This meaning, to define it in one sentence, is: the subordination of production to needs, as much for what is produced as for how it is produced. It is understood that in a developed society, needs are not only quantitative: the need for consumer goods; but also qualitative: the need for a free and many-sided development of human faculties; the need for information, for communication, for fellowship; the need to be free not only from exploitation but from oppression and alienation in work and in leisure.

Gorz's words can serve us as a basic text. We radicals know that since men must not be the means of production, our first task is to eliminate the inhumanities and contradictions inherent in property relationships. For only their elimination will give us the freedom to envision a new man and a new culture.

Such social objectives have some clear implications for colleges and universities. Rather than detail a complete program -- a task which, in any case, ought to be a basic component of any education -- I shall make a few related suggestions.

1. Admission policies should not be geared toward getting the "best" students for any given institution, but toward finding the institution which will be best for the student. It should be recognized that the "best" students are almost invariably the economically privileged.

2. We radicals want a university which does not stress professionalization -- hideous word! -- at the expense of the student's human faculties and natural talents. He must be given the opportunity of developing these at his own pace and by his own methods.

3. The university should become a place where students and faculty can pursue their cultural and social needs as ends in themselves. Ordinarily, the fulfillment of these needs is constrained by the university's master, the social system. We must begin our search with an inquiry into this system: an inquiry which must be allowed to challenge the system -- and the university -- itself.

4. Our goal is a university which transcends the obsessive inwardness of the quest for personal fulfillment: that is, a university which makes students and faculty aware of their social role. The notion of absolute individual freedom is one more ideological trap set by the system. For it allows us an easy escape into a private universe dissociated from our social role.

Capitalism, of course, typically transforms collective needs into individual ones. The academy encourages this transformation -- with notorious success -- by its brutal stress on individual accomplishment (read competitiveness). Students and faculty who are well attuned to the academy's schedule of rewards, therefore learn to carefully plan and rationalize their work with a view toward squeezing the most out of the system, or even beating it. There is a pathos in the attempt, for it is doomed to failure; the very failure to understand the social function of one's own competitiveness leads to inevitable defeat at the hands of the system. Only when students and faculty begin to understand their roles as producers will they be capable of developing their individual roles in terms of commonly -- not privately -- attained freedoms. Rather than learning to beat the system, we must learn to direct our work toward those individual satisfactions which will benefit the whole. But the powers that be know that if we stopped cutting each other's throats, we might, figuratively, cut theirs.

So once more, what is the meaning of these goals if we consider the actualities of power? Does the radical faculty have any power at all? It does, to a degree. This is at least indicated by your desire to listen to my harangue. However, whatever strength we have does not so much derive from our own organizing efforts, but from the contradictions of American higher education. I shall merely allude to a few: deans, presidents, members of corporations never seem to tire of humanistic rhetoric, yet higher education is used for the wider reproduction of labor; they pay lip-service to the traditional notion of the critical intellectual, yet the system rewards professionalism and bourgeois accommodation; they encourage the tacit assumption that education is the province -- even the property -- of students and teachers, yet both the latter know that they are alienated from the products of their labor; most insidiously, they have encouraged their faculties to think of higher education as an instrument of social mobility and amelioration when, in fact, it generates new class hatreds to replace the old, and leads students to view their teachers as agents of social oppression.

The contradictions are also apparent in broader social terms. Industrial capitalism has created a set of needs which it cannot meet, because those needs do not relate to the concept of economic man and the latter's goal of individual consumption. Our presence in this city reminds us that industrialism has destroyed the natural environment, thus giving rise to real -- indeed desperate -- collective needs; these cannot be met by our present social and political structures, because they contradict the criterion of profitability. The needs should be familiar to you; air we can breathe without risking lung cancer; housing and city planning which addresses itself to building a humane environment and which is not reserved for the economically privileged; services such as nursery schools, clinics, and transportation; and, perhaps most importantly, the development of communities having enough cohesion to address themselves -- freely and in their own terms -- to matters of culture and group leisure. All these needs

are fundamentally biological and natural, yet they can be dealt with only by cultural and institutional means, by the imaginative collective use of our resources. I feel safe in saying that none of these needs will be met; they will not be met because they contradict the economic imperatives of our system.

In our society's failure to resolve the contradictions fathered by these needs the university has played an important role. Most obviously, departments of planning, architecture, and economics rarely encourage -- except in their rhetoric -- students and faculty to explore what the real needs of the community are. Academic security and prestige, not to speak of comfortable grants, come to those who meet the demands of their profession. The dangers of the professionalism academic life encourages -- especially to social scientists and planners -- should be obvious. Academics tend to reduce any complex human activity to the construction of abstract models. Build a more elegant model, and academic success will be your need. Left to itself, and separated from the rest of the world, such activity would be harmless enough, though extravagantly wasteful. But any profession sees itself as an elite, as experts whose models should be humbly admired by the ignorant and fervently institutionalized by those in power. The models may involve monstrosities like counter-insurgency or urban renewal or planned unemployment or atomic warfare, but who can show concern for such human trivia or community needs when the rationality of one's model -- one's very expertise -- guarantees the correctness of the enterprise. Any professional elite will almost invariably sell its expertise to those with economic and institutional power; further, it will shape the very nature of its field to the demands of established institutions. The contradictions of industrial capitalism are thus reinforced by the dynamic of professionalism. Are there departments of social science which encourage their students and faculty to work as equals with those constituencies and communities who most desperately need them?

But something curious has been happening with the young. Some of them, to everyone's surprise, have taken the humanistic rhetoric of the academy seriously. Consequently, they have become nearly incapable of living with the contradictions of capitalism and the hypocrisies of the professions available to them. Many students are engaged in an almost frantic -- often desperate -- search for alternate careers and for alternate models of consumption: for a way of life in which production is subordinated to human needs, and activity is geared not simply to production. This search should, of course, be an integral part of higher education. Scholarship, instead of bending students toward exclusively professional concerns, should be the servant of self-discovery; if so, it must begin with an inquiry into its own nature and into the institutions which are engaged in its administration. But for scholarship to perform such a function, scholars will have to reclaim the traditional role of the critical intellectual; further, they will have to establish its centrality for academic culture. Clearly, for this to occur, we shall need

a cultural revolution on our campuses. Yet this revolution is necessary for your own survival; if it is to be suppressed, I have little doubt that your institutions will blow apart, or at least crumble.

The primary academic goal, then, of radical faculty is the development of an alternate culture. As industrial capitalism generates more elaborate bureaucratic structures, the need for autonomous bodies making decisions democratically becomes increasingly urgent. We radicals want universities and colleges to be such bodies. This means making the university a much freer place than it has been; it means student, faculty, and community participation in the administration of learning and research; it means real freedom in the pursuit of scholarship. At the least, radical faculty wants programs which will afford concerned students the opportunity to use the academy not for the production of professional competence and learned monographs, but the production of democratic relationships between people. Our most serious students demand alternatives to bourgeois relationships; they should be given the freedom to develop a significant minority culture.

I have few illusions, if any, that the radical faculty will be joined by most of its colleagues in pursuing these goals. Academics, as I mentioned earlier, have their vested interests. They constitute a privileged caste whose leisure is derived from the surplus value of the masses. The official academic ideology has it that such exploitation is necessary if knowledge and culture are to advance. This strikes me as self-protective myth-making. In any case, the leisure of a chosen few is not necessary for the propogation of culture; if it is, there is something wrong with that culture. That professorships which guarantee the idleness of their incumbents have become a mark of distinction is disgusting; it is a sure sign of cultural decadence. But to countermand this merchant mentality, we radicals must create a different style of life for academics, one not based on individual consumption. We must also develop a more significant set of loyalties: not to alma mater, not to a profession, certainly not to the national interest, but to a vision of a decent and humane life for all. We do not know precisely what form this new academic culture or the relationships within it will take -- nor do we want to know. For it is precisely in shaping the future that students and faculty must be free to communally determine their own fate.

Some of these goals we shall attain: not by your good grace or as a generous gift. Gifts we do not want. Gifts are handed out by kind daddies, and we find paternalism degrading. No, we shall attain some of our goals because America's major institutions need a liberal university. The universities are the training grounds for the professionals industrial society demands; they are the center for the research which guarantees economic growth. Therefore America's financial and industrial centers of power cannot afford a university which alienates masses of its students, nor can they afford a university which

is an armed camp. So you will meet some of our demands in the hope of absorbing us into the liberal academic consensus. We understand this and the risks it involves. But the risks are also yours. For whether we become absorbed or grow into a real force depends on our own clarity of vision. It depends on our determination to settle, ultimately, for nothing less than a free university in a free society.